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ABSTRACT

This program examines the series of myths generated by the media about war, peace, and the use of force. This episode explores the emergence of the popular interpretation of violence by "good" citizens who use violence to produce positive results during wartime. The study guide offers questions to use before viewing the video, questions to follow the video, classroom activities to focus student thinking on the problem, topics for further research, and a list of 10 resources. (EH)

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AMERICA'S DEFENSE MONITOR

Educational TV for the Classroom

STUDY GUIDE FOR

THE MEDIA AND THE IMAGE OF WAR

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THE MEDIA AND IMAGES OF WAR

Do violent images provoke real violence - or is it the other way around? Movies and television have helped transmit from generation to generation a series of myths about war, peace, and the use of force. The impact of such values are explored in this thought-provoking episode of *America's Defense Monitor.* Featured are Richard Slotkin, author of Gunfighter Nation and David Considine, an outspoken leader in the media literacy movement. This 30-minute video can enhance a unit on the media, military history, or the influence of violent images on human psychology.

The popular interpretation of America's history "celebrates" the westward movement of the frontier through war and conquest. Films and television programs about war and the frontier perpetuate the myth that war and violence are the American way to achieve progress. Post-World War II Americans, who grew up with film and television, developed the expectation that the cavalry, western lawmen, and combat heroes always "win". Violence by "good" Americans was always portrayed as producing positive results. This biased view of America's past falsely mythologizes the "man with the gun" as a representative, admirable American.

Because wars are significant events in the American

official OERI position or policy

experience, how the public perceives war is critical. We have been so heavily bombarded with images depicting war as a positive part of our history that we no longer see war for the horror it is. Americans love to watch television and movie wars; but the myth that war is exciting, glamorous, clean - and only lasts two hours - tends to increase our acceptance of war. In war, acts of bravery are common and often essential to victory. But glorifying heroism and presenting war as "good" and "constructive" events that contribute to America's past and present greatness distorts our history and jeopardizes our future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE VIEWING

1) What words and images do you think of when you think of war and combat? Why do you think you think of these images?

2) What do you think the media's influence on the public is? The public's influence on the media?

3) When you view films, how do you draw conclusions from the images portrayed?

4) How have the movies you have seen depicted war?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING

(Note: It may be useful to give students these questions before they see the video so that they will be more prepared for discussion afterwards.)

1) What are some images and ideas that stand out in your mind from the film?

2) How would you describe the perspective that this film presents?

3) What is the influence of Hollywood and TV on the public's perception of the military? Will the fewer numbers of Americans with direct experience in combat effect how we perceive military images?

4) What images of war are predominant in the media? Have these images shaped our expectations of what should be done in national and international policies? What do you think the influence is on policy makers?

5) What are the plots of some war movies you have seen and do they fit the models described in the film? Think about the main characters - what role does the hero usually take on?

6) What impact does the "Myth of the Frontier" have on American tradition? From what historical trends have these images of war come?

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1) Have students either watch a war movie or read a novel that involves descriptions of war to analyze it. How is war portrayed? Do they think this depiction is realistic? Students can then compile their different analyses in class and discuss.

2) According to Dr. David Considine, "*One element of the military myth is the notion that there's no such thing as a bad war and that somehow in the American case, God is always on our side. Part of this, of course, extends back to manifest destiny and to the notion that somehow it was inevitable that the white European Christian would move westward across the United States, trampling the frontier and the original settlers in his path.*" Discuss using examples from recent films or other media sources.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Brainstorming Images

Ask students to brainstorm a list of war movies which they have seen. Then go through each movie and ask students to quickly state the images given in the film with a few words or sentences. Compile the results for each movie on the blackboard. Then discuss these results - what are the predominant images that are popularized by the movies students have seen? This could lead to a discussion of the possible impact of these images.

An Images of War Bulletin Board

Have students look for images or articles portraying war in various printed media. (For example, they could find articles on present conflicts in the news or descripitons of recent movies in entertainment guides.) Students should then cut these out and bring them to class to be onto a classroom bulletin board. Discuss the images they found. How is armed conflict presented in the media they found? Do certain sources present it in a different manner than others? Are there certain ideas or images that are frequently found? This bulletin board can be an on-going class project.

RESOURCES

Basinger, Jeanine. The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

"Global News After the Cold War" in Media Studies Journal, Fall 1993. The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Columbia University, New York.

"The Media and Images of War." The Defense Monitor Vol. XXIII, Number 4. Washington, D.C.: Center for Defense Information. (8-page publication explores the same issues as the video.)

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Regan, Patrick. "War Toys, War Movies, and the Militarization of the United States, 1900-85" in Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 31, No. 1, February 1994. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute: Sage Publications.

Slotkin, Richard. Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in 20th Century America. New York: Atheneum, 1992.

Smith, Julian. Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam. 1975.

"War Through the Eyes of Artists." *America's Defense Monitor.* Episode #603: Center for Defense Information. (30-minute video)

Wetta, Frank J. and Stephen J. Curley. Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War. New York: Greenway Press, 1992.

Yarmolinsky, Adam. The Military Establishment: Its Impact on American Society. New York: Harper and Row.

AMERICA'S DEFENSE MONITOR: THE PERFECT WAY TO BRING ISSUES TO LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

America's Defense Monitor offers an in-depth look at our nation's military and security-related policies. Each thirty minute program is a visually stimulating and entertaining resource for the high school or college classroom. Episodes can be used to supplement regular classroom material or to introduce new topics. By bringing topics to life through the medium of video, this award-winning series can help arouse student interest in crucial issues.

Topics covered by *America's Defense Monitor* range from the social costs of military spending to nuclear proliferation, the arms trade, and the impact of the military on society, the media and the environment. Each program features interviews with important policy makers.

America's Defense Monitor is produced by the Center for Defense Information, the foremost research organization in the country analyzing military issues. The program is broadcast nationwide on the Public Broadcasting Network. For more information and a complete catalogue, contact us at:

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